

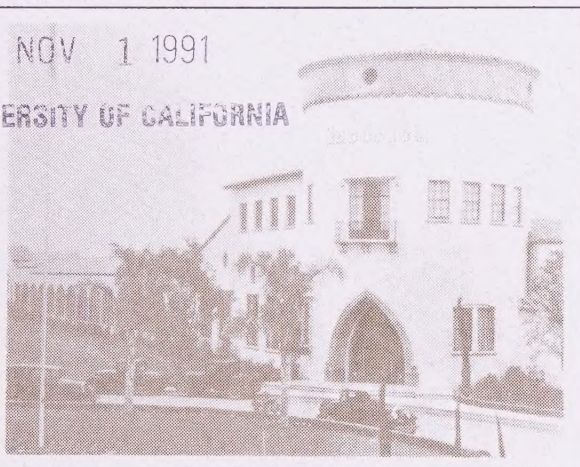
91 01316

Commerce Then

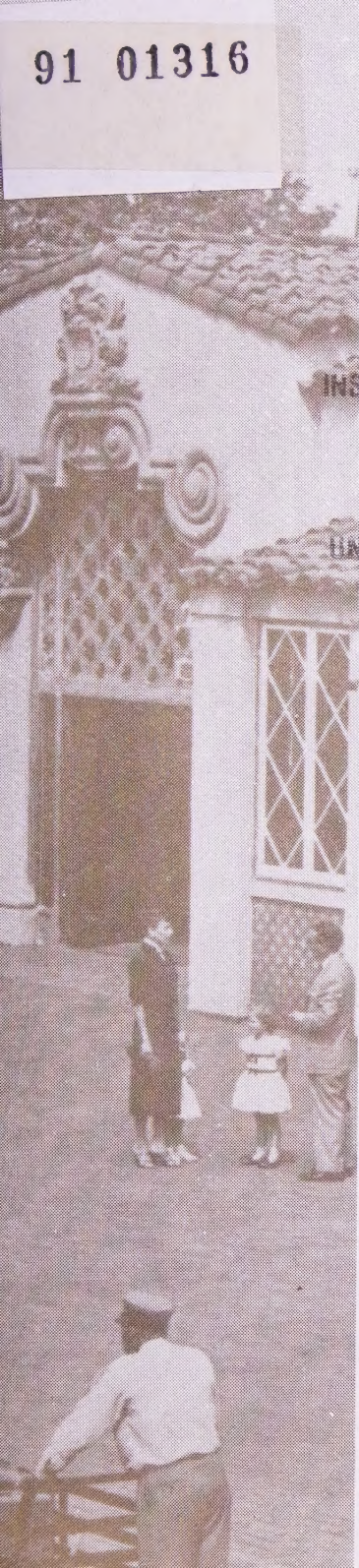
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENTAL
STUDIES LIBRARY

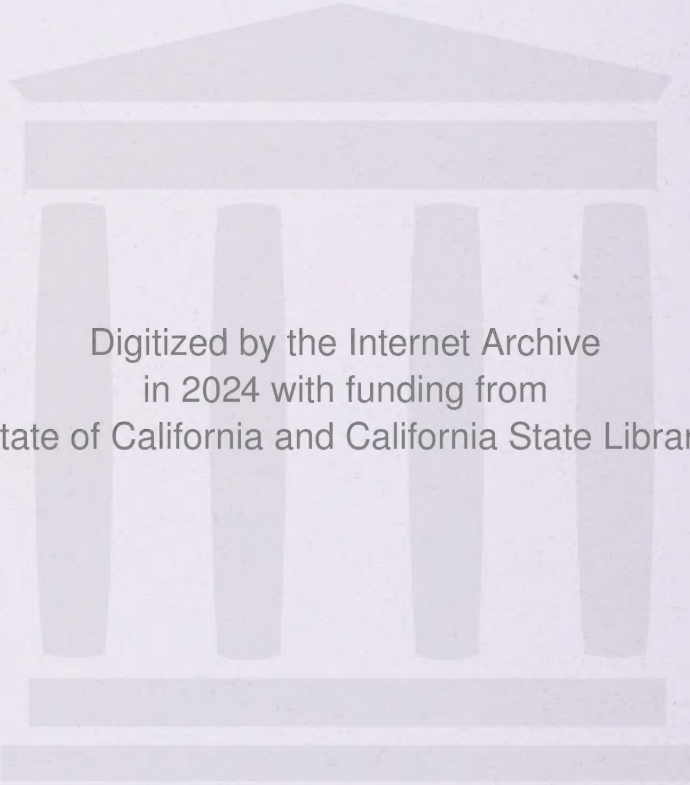
NOV 1 1991

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



*From
an oral history
of the lives
of eight residents
of Commerce, California*





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
State of California and California State Library

<https://archive.org/details/C124904933>

Commerce Then



*From
an oral history
of the lives
of eight residents
of Commerce, California*



Commerce Then

Published by

City of Commerce City Council

Ruben C. Batres, *Mayor*

Artemio E. Navarro, *Mayor Pro Tem*

Ruth R. Aldaco, *Councilmember*

Robert J. Cornejo, *Councilmember*

James B. Dimas, Sr., *Councilmember*

Louis Shepard, *City Administrator*

History Project Advisory Committee

Valentina Bassett, Amelia Bristow, James Groves, Dr. Michael V. Guerra

Eva Long, Lucy Maese, Lu Mericle, Kathryn Pahl, Cora Ruiz, Evelyn Weide

Thomas Hall (Industrial Council), G.C. McEvoy (Industrial Council)

William R. McHaney (Industrial Council)

Project Coordinators

Robert Conover, *Director, Library Services*

Judith A. Rambeau, *Public Information Officer*

Jamie Sutherland, *Archivist*

Michael Brooks, *Oral History Project Coordinator, Montebello USD*

Photography by Sylvia Rico

Book design by Danilo J. Silverio

© 1991 City of Commerce

January 1991

Contents

Introduction	4
Valentina Bassett <i>"I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."</i>	6
Amelia Bristow <i>"I say 'we,' because I was there."</i>	10
James Groves <i>"We've seen a city come into being."</i>	14
Eva Long <i>"My folks used to hunt rabbit all out through here."</i>	18
Lucy Maese <i>"My husband liked to help people."</i>	24
Lu Mericle <i>"I think we have really built a model city. . . ."</i>	28
Kathryn Pahl <i>"We decided to take things into our own hands."</i>	32
Cora Ruiz <i>"We have everything [a] big city has. . . ."</i>	38
Additional Photos, Student Interviewers	44

Introduction

The City Council's purpose for the Commerce 30th Anniversary Oral History Project, conducted during 1990, was to bring older residents who were involved in the city's early years together with school children to increase younger residents' awareness of city history.

Although the interviews were to be transcribed and published, the City Council felt that the most important product of the project would be the interaction of the generations in a way that was new and exciting for both the older and younger residents.

Residents interviewed were all members of the History Project Advisory Committee appointed by the Council because they have lived in Commerce since 1960 and had ties to the community prior to incorporation.

Students from Suva Intermediate School in the Montebello Unified School District interviewed the residents. A majority of each interview team were Commerce students. Their teacher, Michael Brooks, has directed an oral history project for 14 years at Suva as part of his history and social studies classes for fifth through eighth grade students.

Some of the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes and in other cases the interviewees met with larger groups of students in the Suva School library or in a classroom. Teams began interviewing in

February 1990 and finished in December 1990, all during the city's 30th Anniversary year. Several of the interview subjects were interviewed twice.

The interviews in their entirety will appear in a volume of the "Long, Long Ago" oral history published as part of the Suva history/social studies curriculum. Copies of "Long, Long Ago in Commerce" will be available through the Commerce Central Library, as will videotapes of several of the interviews.

Many thanks for the success of the project go to members of the History Project Advisory Committee who gave of their time, energy, and memories to share the residents' viewpoint of "Commerce Then" with the students.

Thank you, too, to Michael Brooks and his students for their enthusiastic approach to this special oral history project. While the students learned much from doing these interviews and compiling their book, they have given Commerce residents something very special in return.

Thank you to Marie Ng, History Project clerk typist, for her tireless hours of transcribing and typing and assisting the project in a multitude of ways.

And thank you to all the residents and business people of Commerce for contributing to the city's rich history.

Commerce City Council

Valentina Bassett



*"I wouldn't
want to live
anywhere else."*

Q: How did you help to build Commerce?

A: That's a good question. Way back in maybe '58 or '59 there were a few people here that decided we should incorporate. At that time, I was very much against it. Then close to 1960 we heard rumors that the city of

▲
*Commerce resident
since 1947*

•
*Children
Charles, Annelle,
Ralph*

•
*Worked in
clerical assignments
at Sears*

•
*Member of
Incorporation
Committee,
currently serving on
Card Club
Advisory Committee,
active in many
civic organizations*



Downey wanted to annex the area where we lived which is now Commerce. They didn't want the people, they wanted the industry because of the tax revenues. So a bunch of us got together. Dean Mericle, Warren Bedell, Lawrence Maese, and myself, were part of a nucleus. Six or seven of us and we got together and we talked about it. Then we talked to the county and we decided, this is what we should do. So we sent out petitions and we got the right amount of names and Mr. Bedell went down and registered our committee with our county and we incorporated. Just like that.

Q: How did you come up with the name the City of Commerce?

A: You know, I really don't know how that name came about. I think at one time there was talk about having a contest to have school children name the city. Living in Rosewood Park we kind of wanted a "rose" in the name of the city but it didn't turn out that way. I really don't remember how it came about.

Q: How did the transportation of the City of Commerce improve after incorporation?

A: Well, the little local areas didn't have any buses [before 1960]. So, I was on a bus committee. Mr. Mericle and Mr. Benson [Stan Benson, a local developer], myself, and some other industrialists decided that Commerce should have a bus route. We talked to the RTD, we talked to Montebello and we decided we should have our own buses. We do have buses now. Maybe some of you kids ride them. There are four different routes and there's not even a fare box on our buses. It costs nothing. Anybody can ride.

Q: Has Commerce changed a lot?

A: Yes, it has changed a lot. In fact I was looking through some old pictures last night and I found pictures of Carlos's [Bassett's grandson who attends Suva Intermediate] mother and my son out on the streets by the house. I have a picture of Rosewood Park and across

the street by the apartments when there were no trees. We even have streets that we didn't have before, things like that.

Q. How many years have you lived in Commerce and what do you think about the city?

A. Oh, I've lived here since 1947. Carlos's mama was born here in 1947 so I lived here a long time before it ever became a city. I like this city. I wouldn't move out for anybody. Sometimes I disagree with the Council and I get up and I tell them what I think and this is what it takes. People have to get involved, but I like the city. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else; not now.

Amelia Bristow



*"I say 'we'
because I was
there."*

Q: How long have you been living in Commerce?

A: Since 1940. It wasn't Commerce when I started to live here.

▲
*Commerce resident
since 1940*

•
*Husband James
Bristow, former
Councilman and
Mayor*

•
*Stepson
Ronald E. Bristow*

•
Registered nurse

•
*Member
of Incorporation
Committee,
long active in
Commerce Float
Association,
Sister Cities
Association, and many
other civic
organizations*

▼

Q: What was it?

A: East Los Angeles.

Q: How has Commerce changed from when you first moved here?

A: Well, it has changed a lot. One of the things that the Councilmen wanted or the first Council wanted was a park and the library where every child in Commerce could walk to. We really didn't have anything to speak of. We had to build it from nothing. And I say "we" because I was there.

Q: Did you have any part in the making of City of Commerce?

A: Yes, my husband and I were on the Incorporation Committee. We just did whatever we were supposed to do. I can't give you all the details. I mainly just voted for the Councilmen. After that, it's the Council that decided what was going to happen.

Q: Who thought of the name Commerce?

A: Well, the man that named it really didn't have a name in his mind, but when he went down to the county, they had to have a name before they could register to be a city. So he just kind of picked it out of the air and named it Commerce. We did have contests to change it, but the Council felt that there weren't suitable names given in the contest so they kept it as Commerce.

Q: What kind of changes have you brought about in your work in Commerce?

A: Well, one of the things that I was instrumental in doing was starting the immunization clinics. When we first started having those we used to have close to 1,000 children because none of them had been immunized. Now, as time went by, everybody was immunized so we finally cut it down. Now we only have one immunization clinic, which starts just before school starts and then, if they have to have more shots, we send them to Roybal Health Center.

Q: There was a park named after your husband?

A: Yes, there is a park named after my husband.

Q: How did you feel about having a park named after your husband?

A: Well, it was an honor. He was instrumental in setting up the City of Commerce and that's why they did it.

Q: Do you think that Commerce has changed for the better?

A: It has changed for the good. Absolutely good.

James Groves



"We've seen a city come into being."

Q. What has it been like, living in Commerce?

A. It's been a marvelous experience, unique in that we've seen the city come into being. The people had input into how and which things would happen. As with everything, there have been problems, but the majority ruled and things turned out best for everyone.

▲
*Commerce resident
since 1943*

•
Wife Elma

•
*Daughters Nancy Anne
and Ruth Margaret*

•
*Inspector of
engineering materials
for the
federal government*

•
*Member of History
Project Advisory
Committee,
avid user of Commerce
Library System,
genealogist*

Q. What difference did incorporation make?

A. We had more and better police protection after incorporation and felt safer letting our children walk to and from school. My wife and I have very much enjoyed using the city library system for research and enjoyment, for the pleasure of reading. We are family genealogists. We use the library for research and we donate our genealogical histories

to the library as we complete them. We also have been tutors in the library's Literacy Program.

Q: You worked for the government during World War II, is that right?

A: Yes, I was an inspector of engineering materials purchased by the government.

Q: Did you move to Commerce because of your work?

A: Yes, I moved to this area in 1943 to be near more than 100 plants that were producing war materials. Some of the companies were Consolidated Steel at Eastern and Slauson, which made guns for the Navy; the Uniroyal plant on Telegraph, which manufactured rubber fuel tanks for planes; and Federated Metals on Bandini, which sold ingot metals to the government. Everybody was doing war work or you didn't have anything to work on.

Q: Would you ever leave Commerce?

A: We've gone to Idaho every summer for the past 10 years or so, but we are always happy to come home to Commerce. This is a good place to live.



Eva Long



“My folks used to hunt rabbit all out through here.”

Q. How long have you lived in Commerce?

A. We moved here in 1940.

▲
*Commerce resident
since 1940*

•
Husband Lloyd

•
*Children Linda and
Lloyd*

•
*Personnel director for
City of Commerce*

•
*Member
of Incorporation
Committee, first
Traffic Commission,
Senior Citizens
Advisory Commission,
founding member
of Soroptimists,
active in many other
civic organizations*



Q. So you've seen a lot of changes since 1940? It was all country around here, wasn't it?

A. It was. I moved here to my dad's and I moved right across the street from Bandini School and lived there until I got married, and we bought this house here. There were very few houses and when we first came out here, my folks used to hunt rabbit all out through here. They also picked mushrooms along the Santa Fe railroad tracks. There were just a few, maybe a half a dozen houses here in Bandini. See, Bandini

originally in the late twenties was developed as a retirement place for teachers.

Q: How did people decide to move here?

A: They used to bring people out in buses from L.A. and show them all around because this was all country out here. That's why you see some 25-foot lots. The majority of people asked for 25-foot lots. Lots were selling for \$3,000. When we bought this house, they threw in a 25-foot lot next door for \$100. We bought another lot later. I think we paid \$800 for it to two little old ladies. They had inherited it from their aunt and she had given like \$3,000 for it in the late twenties. So you know we were lucky to get it for \$800 when we got it.

Q: How did you help make Commerce?

A: Well, I was on the Incorporation Committee. I was the secretary of the Incorporation Committee and I went up and down the street in my neighborhood. You have to have 25 percent of the registered voters before you can vote on whether you want to be a city or not. So I went up and down the streets getting signatures.

Q: How did they choose the name "Commerce"?

A: We had a contest for the name of the City of Commerce. But as it turned out, when they filed the incorporation papers they had already put down the

name of Commerce and so the contest didn't make a difference.

Q: Why did you help found Commerce?

A: Primarily because we only had a library that was open three afternoons a week and it was run by L.A. County. They said, "Well, we're going to close your library and we're going to give you a bookmobile once a week." So that's primarily why the residents agreed to incorporate because we wanted more than just a bookmobile one day a week. Then they told us that we would have other benefits, plus our taxes would be lowered and things like that.

Q: How has Commerce changed?

A: Well Commerce has changed in that we have more people. We have three new senior housing complexes for senior citizens to live in and we have a lot more things now than we used to have.

When we first moved to Commerce, there were very few houses. I liked it because it was open. I like it now because our taxes are very low and our real estate taxes are very low. My property taxes are less than \$300 a year, and you know, that is unheard of in most cities. So I like it because of the benefits that we get. We have the Aquatorium, which is ten cents to go swimming and we have so many programs that don't cost residents anything.

Q: You worked for the city for twenty years, right?

A: Yes. When we first incorporated I was on the Traffic Commission. Then I worked for the county as deputy assessor for a while, for about five years, and then I had a chance to work for the city because I had worked as a county assessor. I was home with my kids in the summer time. After they got older, I went to work for the city. I started out as a civil defense director and then the city decided to build a contract post office and so I supervised that in 1963. Then they gave me the Personnel Department to supervise. So for about the last 15 years, I had the post office and was director of personnel. I never had to go too far to work.

Q: Is Commerce a nice place to work?

A: It is, it is. It's just like all cities—you know every two years they have an election. And it takes a little while to settle down after the election. Then things are fine for a couple of more years. But most of the employees are under civil service so, you know, they're more or less secure.

Q: Do you think the changes in Commerce have been good or bad?

A: Oh, I think they've been good for the residents. We have no trash collection fee. We have one of the lowest tax rates in the country. We, the City, pays all of that for us. We get so much free that, when anybody

moves, they wish they hadn't. Now that's the older people. The younger people buy farther east and farther out. Although when they developed the Village over there a lot of young people bought houses. We have a lot more than we would have with L.A. County, and it's helped the businesses because their taxes have been kept down, too.

Atlantic was a two lane road, you know, going up toward Pasadena. There was no Washington Boulevard. The only street was Telegraph and they used to call it Anaheim/Telegraph Road, I think. But Commerce has changed, too, because we lost Chrysler's, we lost the Mercury plant, we lost Uniroyal, Goodrich. There's not so much manufacturing.

Of course, we still have the railroad. That's why Bandini was always a good place to live or rent because there were so many companies around here that the people could work at. A lot of railroad workers lived out here because it was close to work.

Lucy Maese



*“My husband
liked to help
people.”*

▲
*Commerce resident
since 1950*
■

*Husband Larry,
former Councilmember
and Planning
Commissioner,
ceramics room at
Bandini Park
dedicated to his
memory*
■

*Daughters
Sylvia and Melinda*
●

Clothing designer
■

*Member
of Incorporation
Committee, former
member Parks and
Recreation and
Planning
Commissions,
president of Rosewood
Park Woman's Club,
active in many other
civic organizations*
▼

Q: How did Commerce become a city?

A: The City of Commerce was incorporated in 1960. My husband and I came here in 1950 and immediately we joined the Rosewood Property Owners League and then we joined the PTA and everything that was here. My husband liked to help people.

We started on the incorporation of the City of Commerce later on, but before that we wanted to be annexed by Montebello. We tried very hard and even some of the meetings were in our house, with the people from Montebello—the councilmen and the Mayor. We invited them and they came here to my house and they talked about joining Montebello, not incorporating but annexing.

We had several meetings during the time, but Montebello said they only wanted the Rosewood Park area. Montebello couldn't see the industry helping the city. So then we decided that incorporation would be the best thing to do. We started the incorporation effort and worked very hard.

One day we knew that it was either right now or never because we heard that Downey was out to annex us. Downey really didn't care about the residents, just the industry. Warren Bedell was the head of our Incorporation Committee. He was the one who was dreaming of either going to Montebello or our becoming a city. After Montebello refused us, Warren Bedell got about 30 proponents for becoming the City of Commerce, and in 1959 things began to roll. Warren Bedell got our incorporation papers filed with the county half an hour before Downey got there. It just so happened that myself and Larry, my husband, were one of the couples who signed the papers.

Q: How did you help with incorporation?

A: It was a very hard job to get to be a city, because there were a lot of people who were saying, "Why do you want to become a city? We are happy with what we have now. We get police protection. How do we know that if we incorporate, industry's not going to come and swallow us?" These people thought industry could start buying up the houses little by little and in the end, the people would have nothing. That was one of the worst arguments we had to overcome.

We promised the people a swimming pool, we promised them a library, we promised self-government and more

police protection, more lights, better roads. A lot of things were being promised, you know.

My husband was one of the ones who worked very hard. He got more signatures than anyone else and went around to hard-to-reach places. He got a lot of insults, doors slammed in his face by people who didn't want to hear about it. And they would say, "Okay, Larry, supposing that we sign the papers, supposing that we become a city and then how can you tell us if the industry is not going to move us out of here?" And Larry would come home and say, "You know what? Sometimes I feel that I am pushing these people to lose their homes." We were worried if things wouldn't turn out the way we saw them. It was very hard work.

Lu Mericle



*“I think we
have really
built a model
city. . . .”*



*Commerce resident
since 1944*



*Husband
Dean Mericle,
member of
Incorporation
Committee and
instrumental in
establishing senior
citizen programs
(senior citizen center is
dedicated to his
memory)*



*Children Betty Jo,
Margie, Robert D.,
James E., Jerry R.,
Joe C.*



*Homemaker and
mother*



*Member of the
Incorporation
Committee, Auld Lang
Syne, Commerce
Senior Citizens Club,
Rosewood Park
Woman's Club, active
in other community
organizations through
the years*



Q: How did you get the senior citizens center together?

A: Well, my husband was very interested in trying to keep the senior citizens active. He was so interested in the senior citizens, they should get out and become active and enjoy themselves.

Q: How did you help start the City of Commerce?

A: My husband, Dean, and our neighbor that lived two doors down, Warren Bedell, had been talking about the advantages of having an incorporated city and things that could be done. Warren Bedell did the studying and found out about the requirements for incorporating. They had to include part of Bell Gardens

on the southeast and Bandini on the west and a little bit of the northwest areas beyond the Bandini line, in order to have the required amount of residents for our city to try and get incorporated.

I can remember people meeting here in my living room who really discussed things. Each of them knew of incorporating and talking it up and finding out the benefits. It was really for the benefit of the people that were living here. All of the industry we had around us gave the city a pretty good income through sales tax. In fact, Montebello wanted very badly to annex our section of the city so that they would get in on the sales tax that would be their income from the industry. Because I was working at the school, I couldn't help too much. They finally found that the residents would be interested in voting for incorporating our area, which they did.

Q: Was there any resistance?

A: Oh, I don't know, a little bit.

Q: How has the City of Commerce improved the area?

A: Oh, I think it's done a lot for our schools. There's still a lot for the city, too, because of all we have. I think we have really a model city here. Everybody's homes are neat, clean.



Kathryn Pahl



*“We decided to
take things
into our own
hands.”*



*Commerce resident
since 1948*



Husband William



*Children Joyce,
Laurine, Kathryn,
Joan, William*



*Correspondent for local
newspaper, city public
information assistant*



*Member of
Incorporation
Committee, member of
first City Council,
long-time member and
chair of Parks and
Recreation
Commission, founding
member of Commerce
Float Association,
active in many other
community
organizations.*



Q:

Why was the City of Commerce founded?

A:

Before I became a councilwoman I was just working at the clubs. We went down to the Board of Supervisors and asked if they could put in a pool in what's now Rosewood Park. When we didn't get that, we asked them to put in a sidewalk so the kids could roller-skate and things like that. They didn't do much of anything, so the residents got tired of being left out of everything. The fathers got together and the mothers and put up backstops and took an empty field and made their own baseball field, but the county did nothing and laughed. So we decided to take things into our own hands and become a city.

Q: What was the city like back then?

A: Well, cars were parked in yards. That's one thing I always had to kid about. I hate to see cars parked in yards. The trash pick-up wasn't as good as the city's now. All the streets weren't paved, the trees weren't always trimmed when necessary and some houses weren't in good condition. We have better surroundings altogether today.

Q: What did a City of Commerce Councilwoman do in 1960?

A: As the first Council, we had to learn to run a city. None of us knew what we were in for, but we wanted to run the city properly.

Q: How did you learn how to do that? Just by experience, trial and error?

A: By trial and error more than anything else. I had never done any political work like that, but I had always been a leader in clubs so it wasn't too difficult for me to jump right in the middle of it.

Q: How did you decide what to do first?

A: County officials came and gave us guidance. The night of our inauguration we didn't get home until about 2:30 a.m. because certain measures had to be passed and signed. It was a long night because we had to

go by what the county officials told us to do until we were on our own feet.

Q. Why did you run for Council?

A. Some of my friends thought I would make a good councilwoman and the idea appealed to me. My friends formed a committee of voters to back me up.

Q. So they campaigned for you? Did you do any door knocking yourself? Did you expect to win?

A. Yes, they campaigned for me and I did a lot of knocking on doors and talking to people. I hoped to win. I think everyone hopes to win and you don't always expect to, but you certainly hope to. There were five of us running on the same ticket together and all five of us were elected, which was rather unusual I find. Usually with five working together two or three will be elected but the other two do not. All five of us won, so we were pleased.

Q. You went from door to door asking people to vote for you. How did you feel when somebody said no?

A. I'd try to change their mind and tell them what we hoped to do, but not many came right out and said they wouldn't vote for me. They were a little more tactful than that.

Q. Did you raise money for your campaign, too?

A. No, not really. My kids gave me \$200 to have some literature printed and that was my total campaign fund. My friends held coffee hours for me, where neighbors would come and talk to me about my ideas for the city. Coffee and cookies are not very expensive.

Q. How long were you on the Council?

A. I was only on the council for a comparatively short time. There was a group of men who had run against us and they didn't want any women on the council, so after a few months they had another election and I was defeated. At that time I had gotten my roots into things and I was appointed to the Parks and Recreation Commission, which I served on for 9 or 10 years. I served 6 years as chairman. I belonged to almost every club on the moon—except the Boy Scouts—they wouldn't take me! But I think I was involved in almost every other organization in the city.

Q. What did the Parks and Recreation Commission do at the beginning?

A. We advised on the city's building the parks so the kids could have a place to play. Then we worked on baseball fields and other special things.

Q: Did your family support your city work?

A: Yes. Of course, my children were all married and grown. I didn't start out doing all these things until they were all away from home, but my husband loved my being on the Council and the commission and backed me up in every single way. They used to call him the "dish washer" because when I'd go to so many meetings, he'd say, "Oh go on. I'll wash the dishes." It got to be a family joke.

Q: Did the city name a park after you?

A: It was a building in Rosewood Park—the community center. It was dedicated April 3 [1990] as "Kathryn Pahl Community Center."

Q: How does it feel to have a building named after you?

A: Pretty darn nice. It was totally unexpected. I've received so many nice tributes this year [1990], I can't get over it. It's a thrill to see my name on the building. Last Sunday night I went to a women's club meeting at "my" building and it was kind of drizzling and I know all the women well and I joked and I said, "I want you all to wipe your feet good and clean now, because you're coming in my building."

Cora Ruiz



“We have everything [a] big city has. . . .”

Q: How did you feel when your daughter was elected Miss Commerce?

A: Oh, it was the biggest thrill of my life. There was 43 young ladies and out of the 43, five were picked as

▲
*Commerce resident
since 1948*

•
Husband Leonard

•
*Children Ronald,
Linda Marie,
Katherine*

•
Homemaker

•
*Currently serving on
Library Comission,
former Parks and
Recreation
commissioner, past
president of the
Rosewood Park
Woman's Club, active
in many other civic
organizations*

runner-ups. So when they selected my daughter and four other girls to come up in front, I didn't know which one was going to be a queen, but I figured, "Well, my daughter will be a princess." Then they started eliminating the other four girls and they left my daughter in the middle of the stage. They said I hollered all over the place. It was the biggest thrill. For a year, I was called the Queen Mother because that's a title the mothers get. And this is something that is really very nice for all you young girls to think about. Learn to talk. Don't be afraid of anybody.

Q. Do you still remember when they were building the Santa Ana Freeway?

A. Oh yes. I had a baby. I have three children and four grandchildren. When we moved into Rosewood, we were waiting for our new home to be built so we were able to walk across the freeway which was not a freeway, but a street. I used to take my baby in the stroller and we'd walk across to where the Uniroyal is. You know, the castle which we call now the Citadel.

Q. Do you usually go to Rosewood Park and walk there and remember all the old days?

A. Oh yes. I live half a block from there. I am a past PTA president of Rosewood Park School. There's a great big sidewalk all around the park and when we're tired of staying home at night and when I have time, we walk all around the park. The Aquatorium is right beside us. And then we have the two buildings. One of the buildings has just been dedicated to a long-time resident of Commerce. They named the A building the Kathryn Pahl Community Center. Rosewood Park School has grown a lot because they put bungalows now into the yard where they bring a lot of children from not around our area.

Q. How did Commerce begin?

A. A group of people got together and they decided Montebello didn't want us. Bell Gardens didn't want us. So a few people got together and got petitions to

start a new city because we wanted to become a city. Everybody liked the idea because the county libraries were going to be abolished and we weren't going to have a library. So we got quite a few people behind the idea of Commerce being a city and we became a city. They worked very hard. We have everything a big city has, but we are very small. You can go into Commerce and ask, "Where does Cora Ruiz live?" Right around the corner. Because we're small. We're surrounded by the freeway and surrounded by industry. But it's a nice city.

Q: Do you remember when the City of Commerce was founded?

A: Oh yes, we were right there in the middle. I was going to have a baby, so I wasn't able to go out in the street and work with the rest of the people that were getting petition signatures. But we did become a city and it has been a beautiful city. For our first time in history—this is our 30th anniversary [1990]—we have a woman mayor. Look, girls, what you can look up to. You could become a woman mayor and this is the first in our history.

Q: Was Rosewood Park called by any other name?

A: No, it was always called Rosewood Park.

Q: Do you remember when the four parks started participating in sports?

A. In 1962 I was appointed Parks and Recreation Commissioner so we had only Rosewood Park. My husband and other fathers helped build it up. Then when we became a city we acquired other parks. We have Veterans Park, Bristow Park, Rosewood Park, and Bandini Park and they are being used a lot by the senior citizens. We have the Dean Mericle Center where we have three large senior citizen groups and they do a lot for us. The City gives us free bus services. They give us lunch at \$1.30 for each senior that wants to go. They take you on trips and the city is very good to the seniors and in return also they're very good to the young people. We have a lot of classes and a lot of sports that are offered to all the children in Commerce.

Q. Was Rosewood Aquatorium there when Commerce came?

A. No. Mr. Quigley helped do it. He had architects come from all over and they decided that was the best place for a swimming pool. Have you all been there to swim there at the pool? It's a nice place to go and they teach the senior citizens how to swim. They teach young people how to swim. And it's just a beautiful place to go.

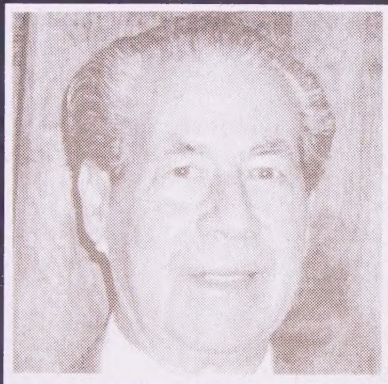
Q. When were the houses built?

A. Well, some of the homes were built during the war. But mine was built after the war. The Rosewood Park section is called the "Beverly Hills of Commerce."

Q. How has Commerce changed?

A• So many new people have moved into the area and it's grown a lot. Our schools have grown and our parks have grown. Our library, which we didn't have way back in the forties, has grown. When I moved into Rosewood, there were hardly any Latins living in there. But now it has changed and I think we're 93% Latin and 7% Anglo. But we're such a mixture you can't say anymore, "I am this or I am that." Because first of all, we are Americans.

Dr. Michael V. Guerra



▲
Commerce resident since 1950

•
Wife Maria

•
Daughter Patricia Ann

•
Chiropractor

•
City of Commerce Councilmember for 16 years, serving four terms as Mayor, founder of Sister Cities

Association, active in many civic, community and church organizations through the years, member of the History Project Advisory Committee.



Evelyn Weide



▲
Commerce resident since 1948

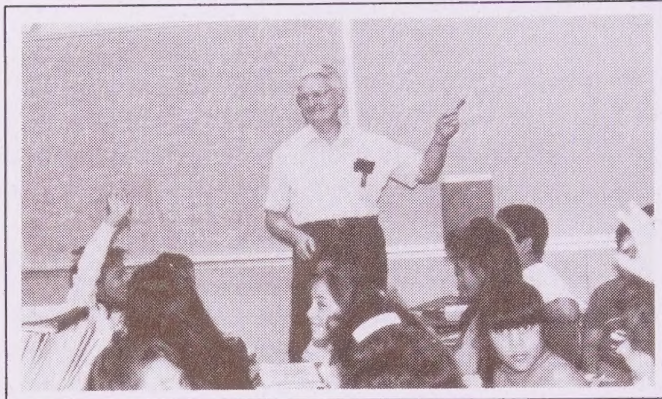
•
Husband Ilo

•
Children Ronald, Dorothy, Karl

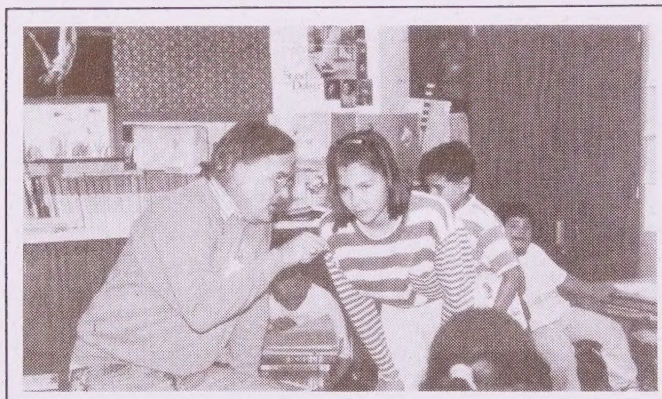
•
State licensed daycare operator since 1949

•
Member of Senior Citizens Advisory Commission, Women's Club of Commerce, Woman's Club of Rosewood Park, the History Project Advisory Committee, and many other civic organizations.





■ *James Groves responds to Suva Intermediate School students' questions about his "life and times."*



■ *Oral History Project coordinator and teacher Michael Brooks with some of the social studies students who participated on the oral history interview teams.*

Oral History Project Student Interviewers from Suva Intermediate School Montebello Unified School District

Omar Aguilar
Michael Alvarez
Raquel Arevalo
Victor Borjas
Veronica Canchola*
Nima Carlos
Edward Castillo*
Jason Chavez*
Angelina Cortez
Jose Cortez
Jose Curiel
Juan De La Cruz
Daniel Diaz*
Guillermo Diaz
Jaime Diaz
Jose Diaz
Victor Duenas
Eunise Evangelista
Jeremiah Figueroa*
Maria Galindo

Judith Garcia
Elena Geraldo
Michele Gonzales
Carlos Grajeda*
Marlene Guerrero
Bobby Guillen
Rosio Gutierrez
Monita Guzman*
Raymundo Hernandez
Gricela Jimenez
Karen Jimenez*
Kate Jones*
Shane Kimbler
Shawn Kist
Caesar Larios*
Yvette Leanos-Juarez
Andrea Lee*
Jesus Leon
Lilia Leon
Ivan Lizarraga*

Monica Lomeli
Victor Lopez
Anthony Lucero
Nicole Lucero
Cynthia MacIiz
Adan Martinez
Juanita Martinez
Maribel Martinez
Michael Martinez
Mandy Marquez*
Miguel Majorga
Magda Medrano
Esmeralda Mojarro
Monique Montoya*
Raquel Murrietta*
Laura Navarro
Olivia Padilla
Maria Rebello*
Oralia Rebello*
Christina Richards

Nadia Robles
Odel Romero
Benjamin Rojas
Karina Salazar
Michael Sandoval
Ignacio Silva
Maricela Solorzano
Maria Sosa
Teresa Stites*
Armando Torres
Shanene Valdez
Arlene Varela
Elizabeth Ventura
Araceli Villagrana
Maria Villagrana

*denotes Commerce resident

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C124904933

*This booklet,
"Commerce Then," is a
companion to a complete,
hardbound history of the
city, City of Commerce:
An Enterprising Heritage,
to be published by
Commerce in April 1991.*

*"Commerce Then" contains
short excerpts from
interviews to be published
in their entirety by the
Suva Intermediate School
(Montebello Unified School
District) "Long, Long Ago"
Oral History Project
directed by teacher
Michael Brooks.*

